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ABSTRACT

Sex education is a crucial part of the school curriculum, and the first responsibility of the school in this area is to train and employ teachers who know their task and accept it with grace. The second responsibility is to recognize the community, its class stratification and ethnic structure so the program will reflect the cultural values of the community. The third responsibility is "to get started." Included in this pamphlet is a chapter on practical suggestions for initiating or improving sex education programs. (Author/HMV)

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THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEX EDUCATION

Elizabeth Mooney

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

FASTBACK
47

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Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

ELIZABETH K. MOONEY

Ms. Mooney's primary interest has always been adolescent development. This fascination enticed her from a high school teaching career, which included Ford Foundation and Fulbright Grants, to graduate work in child development and psychology. The developmental spectrum of the normal and abnormal adolescent became her focus while providing clinical services to youth through the institutional and private practice of psychotherapy.

As research associate at Indiana University's Institute for Sex Research she investigated the effects of sex education on the attitudes of adolescents. Satisfied that more benefit than harm results when youngsters are encouraged to discuss themselves, their feelings, and environment, she returned to education in 1972 in order to teach teachers. She is also using her clinical experience as adolescent counselor at Planned Parenthood in Bloomington, Indiana.

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Series Editor, Donald W. Robinson

THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEX EDUCATION

By Elizabeth Mooney

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Backgrounds 7

The Need for Sex Education 11

Tasks of Adolescent Development 17

Teacher Qualifications 23

School and Community 25

Practical Suggestions 27

Conclusion 33

Practical Reading List 34

BACKGROUNDS

Education is the dissemination of useful information, a rational, accurate input from the collected body of knowledge relevant to any subject or discipline. The method by which this information is disseminated depends to a great extent on the needs of the individual and the resources available to him. If we explore sex education from the point of view of general education, we find that the physiology and anatomy of sex is readily available in schools today. Most physical education and biology curricula contain correct basic information. However, if we consider inclusion of the psychological, sociological, and developmental components which are intrinsic to sex education, it would be hard to find programs which include them. Real and pertinent sex education is hard to come by in the United States.

In the past few years there has been a renewed effort to put sex education into the public school. I say renewed because sex education certainly is not a new idea. In the 1920s a considerable effort was made to get sex education into schools, and at one point it was assumed that sex education was in all schools. Some 540 normal schools had sex education courses in their curriculum. The focus of their programs was to train future teachers to impart information about the human reproductive system and the dangers of venereal disease. This succeeded for a decade, and the job was considered completed. Again in the 1940s there was an effort to put sex education into public high schools. At a time when wars were raging in both Europe and Asia, it seemed important to teach the young people in the high schools the dangers of venereal disease and to provide them with some understand-

ing of their feelings about their own sexuality to protect them from hasty marriage in an unsettled world.

Granted, the efforts in the 1940s were more successful than the efforts in the 1920s, but both programs failed to have any great impact because the scope of the programs was too limited. The material covered in the sex education courses in the 1920s was observation laced with morality. The programs, though well intended, were focused on providing information and guilt laden alternatives rather than information and psychological reassurance to the young.

Ironically, two scientific publications in 1948 and 1953 temporarily set sex education back many years. When Kinsey published his research about the sexual behavior of the human male and female, he set off a forest fire of criticism. His works were not seen as necessary scientific investigation, but rather as a challenge to public morality, a political issue, and a threat to religious teaching. Even today there are groups of unenlightened citizenry who criticize any program of sex education because they presume it to be a Communist plot meant to subvert the morality of the young. If these people were brave enough to investigate Communist theory, they would find that the Communist nations, the totalitarian countries of the world, provide minimal sex education, hoping they will have better control over their young people by not providing it. Shades of the Scarlet "A"!

It is this very issue, the control of the young people and the information they receive, which sends parents into a rage when sex education is proposed in many school systems. Again and again in this country we have heard the cry, "Sex education is the responsibility of the parents; it is not the responsibility of the school. How do we know what is being taught to our children if we do not have control of that information?" The sticky issues involved here are the differences between character education and education for human sexuality.

Rarely is any of this conflict resolved because there is seldom an open discussion of the differences between character education and sex education. School boards, in an attempt to resolve the problems created by a discussion of sex education programs, are faced with the rampant emotionality of parents and the inadequately prepared proponents of a sex education program.

Who would dare to challenge a parent by saying to him, "What do you really know about human sexuality? What facts do you have? What ideas do you have? What do you know about the development of the young?" Rather, school people take a defensive stance, and, all too often, the emotionally charged and irrational parent group wins and the young people lose.

The principle of local autonomy of school systems allows the school board of any community to include or exclude programs in sex education as the citizenry dictates. In the past ten years sex education programs have been put to the extreme test. Superintendents have been hired or fired because of their decisions about programs of sex education. Even though many educators and citizens see a distinct need for including sex education in the public school curriculum, it seems no one can agree how it should be taught, where it should be taught, and by whom it should be taught.

What, indeed, should be included in any program of sex education? There is even a problem about what to call a program in sex education. In some school systems it is called Family Living; in others it is called Contemporary Problems, Human Relationships, or Human Sexuality. In some systems it is taught as a separate course, an entity with a syllabus, with several teachers or one teacher, by outsiders, or even with a specific textbook as its total frame of reference. All of this leads to enormous confusion. Within the last three years a number of systems have taken a strong position. They have variously thrown out their sex education programs, tried to rewrite them, or simply said, "We're keeping what we have; we're going to wait for research to prove us right or wrong."

I have yet to hear of a school system where, when challenged on the instituting of a sex education program, a discussion was held relevant to cooperative efforts of home and school for informing the young about human sexuality. Somehow, we are not brave enough to apply to the subject of sex education the ideas which guide us in the direction of good general education. We do not say to parents, "Look, if our young people have the facts, if our young people have a great number of alternatives from which to choose when making decisions, and if our young people have an adequate description of the consequences of their own

personal decisions, then they might be able to make better decisions regarding their own lives and the use of their own sexuality."

A discussion about sex education does not preclude consideration of moral issues. They are listed among the alternatives. Morality must be examined, but what presents itself as a moral issue for one young person may not present itself as a moral issue for another. The very fact that two young people with different characters sit down and discuss their differences may greatly enhance their ability to make wise decisions in the future. Herein lies the conundrum: We want our young people to make decisions, we want our young people to have a good education, we want our young people to be part of an enlightened citizenry, but we refuse to provide them the tools and materials with which to accomplish the task. There comes a time, somewhere around the beginning of puberty, when everything closes up. Nobody pursues accepted goals of education except a few brave and outspoken teachers who see young people in a terrible quandry. Youthful decision making and self-understanding is thwarted just as the struggle with manhood and womanhood is beginning.

THE NEED FOR SEX EDUCATION

If I understand the American educational system correctly, its main goal is to educate the individual, to help that individual set his goals, and to maximize his potential, socially, economically, and psychologically. In short, one of the goals of education is to help produce an enlightened citizenry. All the verbiage, all the platitudes about the goals of general education, fall on admiring parental ears as long as the youngster whom we are educating is in the lower grades. As soon as the youngster reaches puberty, adults start to reverse themselves because of their feelings and the fears those feelings produce. Parents and educators tend to ignore emotional and factual needs of the young person, who is more in need of facts and ideas and alternatives when he is thirteen than when he was nine or ten years old.

At a time when facts and ideas which would lead to good decision making and easy-to-live-with consequences are very much needed by the young person, he is suddenly faced with the acne curtain, a conspiracy of silence by the adults around him. It is evident—ask any teen-ager—that at a time when he most needs help in self-discovery and understanding his own sexuality, he must play a cloak-and-dagger game to find an opportunity to discuss his problems or investigate his alternatives in a forthright manner. At this point the accepted premise of general education seems to fall apart, especially in the area of human sexual development. Pubescent youngsters are confused because of the emotionality of the subject matter and a reticence by adults to level with them.

In the past five years there have been several small studies

in which youngsters (age ten to fifteen) were asked to identify some of their personal problems. Though the questions were framed in a variety of ways, youngsters were expected to respond to the query, "What would you like to talk about with adults but do not have the chance to talk about with them?" The responses contained three universal categories: rules and freedom of decision, sexual feelings and information, and work expectations (money problems with parents and academic problems with teachers). The youngsters reported that they did not initiate the desired discussions because adults got mad when the subjects were mentioned or they (the kids) were too scared to bring up the subject. The youngsters, it seems, are on to us. How often have you given an annoyed response to shut off further discussion?

By the time youngsters are five or six years old they have a pretty fair idea about where they came from even if they have been fed the old found-you-in-the-cabbage-patch or stork-brought-you stories. Youngsters have enough sense to ask the question of their peers since they usually do not believe the fiction told by their parents. The anatomical questions about boy and girl differences are eventually answered, but the why-am-I-different questions are left unanswered, or else the kids are stalled by an I'll-tell-you-when-you're-older routine.

We are terribly generous with our children when they are small; we painstakingly prepare them for everything from their first trip to the dentist to their first meeting with the department store Santa Claus. We are less than generous with our youngsters who are leaving childhood and entering puberty. Girls are told they are going to have some physical changes—they will develop breasts and have periods. But who tells them they are going to feel differently from the way they feel as children? Rare is the parent who says, "You are going to have a whole new body which you must get accustomed to living with, and it isn't always going to be easy." Growth and socialization processes are always painful. The youngster who is entering puberty should have some fair idea of what he or she will be as a person, and providing the idea should be a cooperative effort between home and school. Youngsters have a right to know why the changes are taking place in them. Frequently no one explains that the final stage of physical maturity, when hormones activate the repro-

ductive system, can be an emotionally painful and frightening experience. The youngster also has a right to know there are differences in normality. How often we have seen a young person struggling with puberty, trying to be like someone he knows, blithely unaware that what he or she is as a person is not only important but interesting. Finally, everyone needs to know that he has a right to be comfortable with his sexuality. And if adolescents have that right, then they also have the right to talk to someone, that precious someone, when they are having difficulties handling their new found sexuality and the feelings that go with it.

Perhaps it would be useful for us to investigate where youngsters learn about their sexuality. Obviously, the first place where such learning goes on is at mother's knee. We discover which sex each of us happens to be. We are taught sex appropriate responses for the first few years of our lives, thereby indelibly imprinting on us our sex role in life as a male or female. And after we have learned through verbal and nonverbal indicators what is expected of us as a boy or girl, we begin to become curious about what is expected of others, particularly the different or opposite sex. We begin to ask questions when we are three or four years old. How those questions are answered by parents determines how many more questions we will ask. By the time a child is six he has discerned the attitudes toward sex behavior held by his parents and older siblings, and he acts within the acceptable perimeter of those attitudes if he seeks approval of the peer group.

There are those who will still go along with the Freudian concept of latency. However, many educators have rejected latency as an absolute in childhood years. Rather, they believe latency is created by the atmosphere which surrounds the answering of questions and the unspoken attitude of parents and other adults in the child's life. For example, if a child asks a question and gets a direct and accurate answer, but perceives nonverbal conflict in the attitude of the parent or adult answering the question, the youngster picks up the disquieted mood and will not be comfortable in asking that adult for further information. Kids are much more astute in picking up nonverbal discomfort than we adults give them credit for being. It is important for us to know

that the premise of latency has never applied to some cultures in the world, particularly non-Western cultures, where there is no diminution of any of the question asking as the children develop, where sexual behavior, sexual growth, and sexual activity are discussed openly and even encouraged by parents.

When our youngsters find they cannot ask questions of adults and get comfortable answers, they go underground. They observe and ask questions of their peer group. This means that the eight- to eleven-year-old group becomes their major source of information, so that their sex education is based on shared ignorance. The signals and knowledge which youngsters do get from adults are easily misinterpreted, and since the young have limited means for discussing what they see and think or how they feel, the misinterpretation is perpetuated until puberty, when it can become a real problem.

It is equally important for us to know at what age kids learn specific things about their own sex functioning. For example, most youngsters of seven have a pretty accurate idea of what pregnancy is and that it happens to women, though they may have very erroneous ideas about sexual intercourse. It is common for the 10-year-old girl in the fifth grade to be shown a film and have a discussion about menstruation. Yet the youngsters who are getting this information may not have a clear understanding of how one becomes pregnant. It is not uncommon for a youngster of thirteen to be totally unaware of what is involved in conception even though he or she may know what happens in sexual intercourse.

Because they have only bits and pieces of information, young people tend to put their fantasy and scraps of knowledge together and come up with some pretty bizarre ideas regarding human sexual behavior. For example, a girl past menarche may conclude that she can get pregnant if she kisses a boy. Boys are often very badly shortchanged when it comes to getting information in early puberty. It is a rare school that provides young males with any information about their nocturnal emissions or erections. One can find many examples like the youngster who, after conquering bedwetting, wakes up one morning with his pajamas and bed clothes wet and stained, terrified because now some new phenomenon over which he has no control is occur-

ring. He strips the bed, knots his pajamas, throws the whole bundle into the hamper, and hopes his mother does not find out what happened.

A young male or female socially comfortable with his peer group might discuss sex with best friends. The best friends, however, are usually the same age and going through some of the same problems with their sexuality as the boy who has just had a nocturnal emission or the girl who is menstruating and worried about pregnancy. So the peer group is of very little value except to excite the problem. We still run into youngsters who think masturbation causes acne. The poor kids are doubly damned: not only do they look pimply and oily, they assume the whole world knows that they are masturbating. The process by which youngsters get information from their peers is colored by a typically adolescent manifestation: an intricate fantasy system which fills the gaps created by an enormous lack of information.

It is a rare parent who will talk to his youngsters about masturbation, and those who do usually talk about it in a negative way. And yet, we know from research that about 95 percent of all young males and well over half of the females masturbate. Masturbation is a perfectly normal developmental process, and we have not acknowledged it by teaching about it in the school. Parents say they want to assume the responsibilities for sex education of their children, but judging from what youngsters tell educators, parents teach them very little factual information and certainly do not help them as they are going through the social processes and the fantasy-provoking situations of early adolescence.

About 80 percent of young females learn about menstruation from their mothers or sisters. Please note, girls receive information, but nobody bothers to teach boys about menstruation. Parents do not do a good job when teaching either boys or girls about nocturnal emissions. Rarely are youngsters told about nocturnal emission, erection, or sexual intercourse, and kids have to find out about them through questions or experience among their peers. Mothers tend to do a better job of sex educating than fathers. Fathers seldom enter into the teaching situation with their kids. The lack of male parent participation is easy to understand in light of the perpetual deficiency in male sex educa-

tion. No father chooses to appear foolish by revealing his ignorance to his child.

It is not uncommon to find sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, both male and female, who know nothing about contraception or menopause, but these same students can describe where the fallopian tubes are because of that classic little diagram used in the school room. These are youngsters who are going steady and sharing intimacies, but many of them have never had an opportunity to discuss with a concerned adult, in an open and friendly way, the difference between having sex and making love.

TASKS OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Anyone who has done some thoughtful study in the area of normal adolescent psychology has come across the five keystones of adolescent development. They are the development of 1) a sexual identity as a man or woman, 2) intimacy, 3) emotional independence, 4) a value system of one's own, and 5) a life work goal. If we assume that adolescence is a bridge between childhood and adulthood or maturity, whichever term you prefer to use, then we must say that the five tasks of adolescence are the obstacles that are placed on the bridge. The child must fight his way through these obstacles in order to reach the other end of the bridge, which is adulthood. If we accept the tasks of adolescence as the essence of growing up, we also realize that the tasks of adolescence have sexual components. It is because of the sexual components that some of the problems in adolescence arise.

A young man seeking his sexual identity, his identity as a man instead of a boy; must look at his peers and at male models from the generation above him, and then he must decide what components he needs in order to identify himself as a man. He has had many role models from which to choose; now he must select those which are comfortable, strike out on his own, and set some goals for himself as a young man. He does not want to turn back; he does not want to fit into the family structure as a child. Familiar with that position, he wants to forge ahead and model himself after others whom he admires, maybe a sports figure, maybe a favorite teacher. It is almost always someone outside the home because he is now ready for the primary influence to come from outside. If at sixteen or seventeen a young

man is coerced by his family into a discussion of his feelings about his sexual identity, he considers it a return to childhood status. He would certainly avoid such regression and would protect himself by avoiding such an encounter.

We would certainly say that a youngster with the following problems is in need of help. The youngster is thirteen-years-old, has a completely new body to which he or she must become accustomed, and a whole new set of circulating hormones are giving the kid strange feelings. Dating has just started. There is a desire for intimacy to find out what someone else is like. Best friends are found one day and abandoned the next. A value system problem is encountered when the youngster sneaks out of the house in the evening to meet someone with whom the parents have some quarrel. This is a youngster who is acting out against parents in an irresponsible manner. One day a kid is told to act grown up: "You're too old to behave like that." The next day: "No, you can't stay out past eleven. I will not allow it. You are much too young for that." Any professional person who is asked to alleviate these symptoms would say that this kid is in need of some neutral person with whom he could discuss his feelings and problems. He also needs a joint conference with a neutral observer and his parents.

In order to move from childhood to adulthood, one has to establish a comfortable degree of intimacy with someone outside the family structure. Everyone needs a friend, someone to trust, a person with whom one can discuss fears and pleasures. This is the part of the growth process which allows the opening up of an individual. It is absolutely necessary to develop intimacies or close sharing experiences of an emotional nature in order to trust one's fellow man. As a youngster progresses into the socialization process, he has to learn to love someone outside the family structure with all the trust that love implies. If he finds an individual who meets the immediate love needs, it is unlikely that conversation or discussion about the degree of that intimacy will be taken back into the home. It would be interpreted as a step backward away from adulthood.

During adolescence all young people strive toward social and emotional independence, a final cutting of the apron strings, so to speak, a sense of self apart and distinct from the family. Free-

quently young people take the first step toward emotional independence in their efforts to establish relationships with those of the opposite sex. It is very unlikely that discussions about the nature of the relationship would be held within the family setting simply because it would jeopardize the independence of the young person.

Youngsters are often expected to participate in a plan which leads them to financial independence. Parents take pride in their children's enrichment of a savings account by contribution of baby-sitting or lawn-mowing money. In some social classes an adolescent is expected to pay room and board or contribute a portion of his weekly earnings if he finds a job. Financial independence is encouraged and praised while emotional independence is interpreted as noncommunication, nonloving and even sneakiness. Parents are traumatized by their youngster's first efforts at emotional independence, and the most common reaction is to be hurt by the young person's desire to break away from the child dependency state.

Now we get into a very emotionally charged area of development, the explorations of the value system. It is widely held that a youngster develops his initial character system by the time he is seven- or eight-years-old. He absorbs, by inclination and by direction, by nonverbal and verbal clues, the value systems of adults who are meaningful to him. Usually these are his parents and immediate family, his favorite teacher, his minister, his peer leader, or perhaps a favorite neighbor. A prepubescent child is always in a dependent state. He must toe the line and avoid parental displeasure in order to keep peace within the structure in which he lives. Most children have a pretty good idea what behavior is considered right and wrong within the confines of the child-world in which they live. A value system is defined in terms of the limits which are set for the young person, of what will be tolerated by those on whom he is dependent.

But when a child reaches puberty he is faced with the task of developing a value system of his own, and he does not start from scratch. He has the collective value system of his peer group to consider as he works out a value system of his own. He uses the input from the parental setting, from his adult role models, from the community at large, and he adds to these the

various elements of the value systems he detects in his peer group. He then begins to experiment in order to develop a value system of his own. This is probably the most frustrating period of child development for both parents and their children. We call them turbulent teen-agers or rebellious youth; we describe this stage of life with unflattering adjectives, and we forget that part of the problem is created by the youngster's attempt to work out a value system with which he can live.

In order to put together a workable and comfortable value system, experimentation is necessary for the teen-ager. A kid who defies authority, acts out sexually, becomes combative, quits going to church, or adopts a new mode of dress or speech may be testing out his ability to comfortably accept or reject what he learned as a child. At this stage of adolescent development his decision making becomes crucial to the future of his value selection. An unwanted pregnancy or juvenile court record is a tough consequence to accept for choosing a poor method of value testing. Value clarification techniques in school are very useful, and there are several excellent books available for use within groups. The process of value clarification does not threaten the value held by an individual, but rather aides in distinguishing the etiology and strength of the value the person holds. Such clarification often helps a youngster enhance his own self-image by making him realize his self-value.

•Working to establish the direction of life work seems to be the easiest task or obstacle which the youngster faces. We are a work-oriented nation, and the young are indoctrinated early with the concept of the work ethic. We do not seem to loose communication with the young in the area of life work resolution as a task of adolescence. This may be true because there is less sexual consideration in the task. Before the advent of equal rights legislation, females were discouraged from selecting life work goals which were considered exclusively male occupations and activities. We appear to be moving toward a healthier conceptualization of the constitution of masculinity and femininity as it affects life work selection.

In the four areas where there is an active sexual component, there is an attempt by the youngster to hide his activities from the parent so that he is not laughed at, so that he is not con-

demned, so that he does not appear to be challenging his elders and thereby infuriating them further. This does not mean that the youngster does not want to discuss his activity, he just wants to talk with an unemotionally involved (nonparent) adult.

For those who object to sex education, the answer is to let the home do it, the church do it, or the family doctor do it, but for heaven's sake, do not let the school teach sex education! This is a very provincial approach because most families no longer have a family doctor. There seems to be no one in the above group with whom the youngsters have good rapport and who is willing to devote the time to answer the myriad of questions that might be asked by a pubescent youngster. Recent studies have shown that the young people do not feel they get sexual information from the church. They do get character education from the church, and they do get a sense of what is right and wrong, but their questions about development and feelings are not answered because people who are supposed to answer questions have neither the information nor training to answer those questions.

The point of all this explanation about the tasks of adolescence is that an impossible situation results when parents attempt to do all of the sex educating of a teen-age, adolescent, pubescent youngster. The cards are stacked against the success of this operation because the emotional ties between the young person and the parent are severely strained during adolescence, and it takes a neutral, understanding, and knowledgeable outsider to help the youngster realize what and who he really is.

It is evident from studies of youth in this country that young people do not totally reject or erase the value systems of their elders, their community, or their religious background, but they do modify, exchange, and in some way carve out a value system of their own with which they can live comfortably. If they are given the opportunity to examine that value system which they are about to cull and trim and to examine the values with which they are experimenting, youngsters do not react as defensively as they do when denied the option of discussion and contact with other people who are going through some of the same problems.

The school has a tremendous potential for help. The setting is a natural one; it is the work focus for the adolescent. Dis-

cussion is a comfortable, everyday experience in school, a neutral arena to discuss feelings, thoughts, ideas, and frustrations. It is beneficial to the student and a very important part of the responsibility of the school system to foster discussion in these areas.

TEACHER QUALIFICATIONS

A major advantage of the school is that it provides the very peer group a youngster most admires. Kids are always comparing themselves to other kids, always wishing themselves like others, and often they do not realize that the others whom they so admire reflect their admiration. If students are given enough opportunity to discuss and look at all of their problems and frustrations, they may realize the advantages of discussing common difficulties. Occasionally this can be done in a youth group setting, but certainly the school's availability makes it the most natural and convenient place for discussions of adolescent tasks.

A major soft spot in most school programs is the problem of teaching qualifications. Who should teach sex education? Where will this individual be trained, and how much responsibility for the content of any particular instructional program shall this individual be given? Where can we find an individual whose academic background is steeped in sociology, anthropology, and psychology, who has a working knowledge of embryology, genetics, anatomy, and physiology, who is an expert in child development, and who is comfortable with the material needed when teaching sex education or human sexuality; a person who is unshockable, who can establish rapport with students and colleagues and yet remain low-key in approach, who is respected by parents, and a person who is admired within the community? In that one individual we would have the makings of a superb teacher of sex education. This, as you have already concluded, is a rare individual.

Today we are not training students in our schools of education

to meet these qualifications. We are not even coming close. We are not encouraging students in anthropology and psychology who have had a good background in biology to get the other qualifications so desperately needed to provide a good background as a sex educator. There is no reason to assume that this individual might not be the English teacher, the history teacher, or the physical education teacher. But it is reasonable to assume that this individual needs special training in order to take on the tasks which are involved in teaching about sex function, human sexuality and development. The task of designing the program, an ongoing program, based on the needs of youngsters at any particular developmental level, takes a great deal of extra work, academic work, on the part of the teacher who wishes to go into this field.

If there were one fundamental quality of an efficient teacher of sex education, I would pick being comfortable with the material. No matter how well educated an individual may be in the academics of sex education and child development, if he or she is not totally at ease with the subject material, youngsters sense it, respond negatively or discordantly, and the result is useless or distorted sex education. This is one subject area where it is terribly important for the teacher to keep his cool. A teacher of sex education cannot be effective if he or she is embarrassed when certain words are used or offended by four-letter words with sexual connotations. No sex educator can be effective if he or she is the purveyor of cute, off-color jokes within the classroom or, on the other hand, is offended by some of the crude jokes repeated by students. It must be expected that students will test the teacher's response by trying out such material.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Too often sex education has been considered the responsibility of either the parents or the school. This is much too simplistic. Rarely in life does one find mutually exclusive situations, and certainly in education there is no place for such absolutism. Sex education is the responsibility of both the parents and the school.

The responsibilities of parents are to present the first sex information to the child as the child asks for it and to provide an atmosphere which encourages questions and discussion of sexual matters just as other subjects are discussed within the family setting. Parents are responsible for setting behavioral limits for their children and for conveying values which represent the family's parameters of acceptable and commendable behavior. Parents certainly give a child his first impression of himself and his sense of worth, an extremely important concept which may influence the child's entire life. Parents can and should aid the school through cooperative efforts to help the individual youngster realistically integrate his personality. This means continuing contact between parents and teachers.

The responsibilities of the school are seen in a slightly different framework. The school can anticipate and meet the emotional needs of the student through developmentally attuned instructional programs. The school can also help to interpret behavior and feelings to the student and his parents, because in school the threat of emotional reprisal can be avoided. Anyone familiar with the work of Eric Berne or with Thomas Harris' transactional analysis concepts is aware that families often get into difficulty because of the emotional ties which naturally exist.

An understanding teacher can often be far more objective in analyzing a situation than a parent. Who else but the school can provide a smooth transition from childhood to adulthood with such a wide framework of knowledge and experience? Certainly most parents are not well enough versed in anthropology and sociology or psychology to be able to present comparative material to the youngster who feels there is more to his behavioral world than he sees.

The school's ability to interpret peer pressure to the student and his family relieves tension for both. The school, with its more objective view and experience with many students, is hep to the developmental situations in the adolescent culture. Finally, the school represents all segments of the community or society and, as such, can accurately represent, through teaching, the many views held within the various segments of the community. In this manner the school can provide the student with a better understanding of where he is compared to his peers, his parents, his community, and his world.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

After the theory and criticism are presented, one is expected to be practical. The following items are offered as a first step approach to aid schools who recognize their responsibility for the sex education of their students.

Present Programs

Strength	Weakness
1. Most sex education programs familiarize students with scientific vocabulary and terms. This is done in a straightforward manner.	Most programs do not include the emotionally laden street or common terms of anatomy and sexual activity.

Improved Programs

All terms and vocabulary for anatomy and sexual activity would be presented in a straightforward manner by at least junior high level so that the emotional impact of the nonscientific language is dulled and many misunderstandings are clarified. This approach acknowledges class and cultural differences in terminology as being secondary to understanding.

Present Programs

Strength	Weakness
2. Many sex education programs stress the seriousness and responsibilities of marriage.	Most programs do not provide for an acceptable alternative to marriage.

Some even provide instruction in basic child care, budget making, and installment buying.	Nonmarriage is, by omission, treated as an abnormality. The sexual concerns of the married or almost married couples are not explored or discussed.

Improved Programs

Improved programs would allow for investigation of available sociological data about various life styles. They would also fill in the gap between engagement and childbearing by providing information and reassurance and by demonstrating genuine concern for the perceived or anticipated sexual problems of the young.

Present Programs

Strength	Weakness
3. There is genuine concern for the student's health, and information about venereal disease is included in the health education program in many schools.	Sexual health is too often seen only as freedom from VD. The young people who most need the information about venereal disease are school dropouts, and most programs do not present the material until tenth grade—after the dropouts have left school.

Improved Programs

Improved programs would teach about sexual health within the context of total human sexuality and response. The appropriate material would be presented by age fourteen, and a more realistic, less frightening, approach would be used. Syphilis and gonorrhea are not co-equals in seriousness today, yet they are taught as such in most existing health education programs.

Present Program

Strength	Weakness
4. The vertebrate reproductive system is commonly taught in American schools. Some of this	Frequently species other than the human are used in teaching reproduction. Misleading ideas

work begins in the first grade and is clarified by the high school biology courses.	and information are left with the student where no comparison is made between lower animal and human mating. The guinea pigs and the hamsters used in the classroom do not marry, they mate. Males among the lower vertebrates do not participate in raising the young as do human fathers.

Improved Program

Improved programs would make specific comparisons between human sexual relationships and other animal sexual relationships. This would be done at the elementary level so as to avoid confusion and misinformation at a later stage of development. The distinct difference between having sex and making love would be pointed out by age ten so that ensuing sex education has a base upon which to provide appropriate information.

Present Program

Strength	Weakness
5. The social aspects of relationships are included in many sex education programs. Dating courtesy, social behavior, and activities are investigated and discussed.	Usually these are one-shot units in the eighth or ninth grades instead of continuing programs geared to the developmental level of the student. Another pitfall lies in the antiquated material presented in the social relationships units; they are often more in tune with the teachers' perception of the material than with the reality of the student's situation.

Improved Program

Improved programs would allow the students to develop the units on social relationships. Peer pressure and consensus would be used to advantage during the social structuring years, eleven to fifteen.

Present Program

Strength	Weakness
6. The development of masculine and feminine roles and their components is included in many sex education programs. This is a subject of great concern to postpubescent students.	Many myths and fallacies are left uncorrected in a majority of the existing sex education programs because the social forces outside the school tend to reinforce the errors. It takes a teacher with unusual knowledge and student rapport to correct the misconceptions about what constitutes masculinity and femininity. Old saws are still common: boys have a demanding sex drive and girls do not; girls are supposed to have sexual allure but simultaneously evoke a sense of purity; or good-girls-can't-get-pregnant. Youngsters are misled by false concepts of what men and women do to establish and maintain their gender identification.

Improved Program

Improved programs would train teachers to discuss sex object choices with accurate information and objectivity; they would be comfortable talking with their students about sexual exploitation, the nonsignificance of penis size, physique, breast size, and body hair. Such a teacher would be able to teach the young that there are no absolute ingredients in the masculinity or femininity of the individual, but rather a self-perceived level of comfort with oneself and others.

Present Program

Strength	Weakness
7. Most sex education programs include some discussion of love;	Love and physical attraction or sexual arousal are rarely dif-

some even encourage the students to construct a workable definition of love.

ferentiated. The romantic notion of falling in love is allowed to continue. Self-love and its merits are rarely investigated.

Improved Program

Improved programs would include extensive discussion of self-image or self-love and its importance in a sustained interpersonal relationship. The components of the love relationship as they differ from infatuation or attraction would be diligently outlined.

Present Program

Strength

8. The individuality of the human being is acknowledged in most existing programs. What is right for someone else may not be right for you—that is a common denominator of many programs.

Weakness

Value systems, their origins and development, are rarely discussed in existing sex education programs. Generally teachers are reluctant to allow free discussion of religious teachings, cultural influences, and parental differences, all of which are components of the individual's emerging values system.

Improved Program

Improved programs in sex education would contain extensive discussion of the process involved in the development of an individual's value system after careful and objective delineation and exposition by the teacher of various religious and cultural teachings and expectations regarding sex. The importance of peer differences would be explored by age sixteen so that there can be a smooth transition between the childhood approach to sex and the guilt associated with it and the adult approach to sex and self-understanding. Investigation of the differences in attitude between Western and non-Western cultures through use of anthropological material would be pursued.

CONCLUSION

With an honest approach to sex education in the middle and secondary schools of our country we can narrow the hypocritical gap between our pronouncements and our actions. Forthright programs designed to enhance the individual's sense of self as a male or female are greatly needed in a country which judges a man on the basis of what he does for a living or how much money he makes rather than how he lives up to his professional principles. Sex education is crucial in a land where being a woman has so many implications that a small war is being waged over the meaning of the term.

Sex function is a natural endowment; it is as basic as sleeping or eating. The school cannot continue its dissemblance by allowing the dirty joke to be the community's source of knowledge about sex function. The next generation will have to fight through another mess we left for them if sex education is not provided.

The first responsibility of the school in the area of sex education is to train and employ teachers who know their task and accept it with grace. The second responsibility is to recognize the community, its class stratification and ethnic structure. By so doing, programs of instruction can reflect the developmental and cultural needs of the individual community. No single program is right for all school systems; we cannot borrow and swap curricula or philosophy as we do textbooks. The third responsibility of the school is to get started. We have been talking about education in the area of human sexuality for half a century. Let us get it together: use our skills, research, graduate schools, and trust to get the education to the kids. We know the whys and wherefores; we just have not formed them into resolutions for action.

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